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OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

Introduction

Salisbury's seaside location, easy access to the highways and low tax rate makes it an attractive place to live, work and play. The Town contains significant amounts of open space including Salisbury Beach, a 3.8 mile long sandy beach that forms the eastern boundary of the Town, the Merrimack River, a very wide and deep tidal estuary which forms the southern boundary of the Town, an extensive system of tidal creeks and salt marshes, inland wetlands areas, farmland, wooded areas and a town green. The Town also has significant public recreation facilities including Salisbury Beach State Reservation, hiking and biking trails, parks, and athletic fields.

Salisbury's rural fabric, abundance of forests and ocean location provides residents with many and varied opportunities for outdoor recreation. As noted in the 2004 Community Development Plan,¹ nearly ninety percent of the Town was comprised of open space including forests (40%), wetland and estuaries (36%), open and agricultural (10%) and recreational (4%) land in the year 2000.

The Town has experienced significant residential growth over the past several years which has resulted in the loss of open spaces. The growth has also changed the urban

¹ *Salisbury Community Development Plan* prepared for Community Development Plan Committee, Salisbury Planning Department by Community Design Partnership in Association with Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, dated June 2004.

form and to a degree, the sense of place in and around the Salisbury Beach area and has placed additional demand on the use of existing recreational facilities.

The Town recently updated the 1986 Open Space and Recreation Plan. The document, *Salisbury Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2006-2007*, includes an inventory of the Town's open space, natural resources and recreational areas and a five year action plan to guide the Town in its efforts to preserve and, where necessary, expand these resources for future generations. The Plan identifies three main open space and recreation goals for the community:

1. Preserve and protect the Town's natural resources
2. Preserve the scenic quality and rural character of the Town of Salisbury
3. Meet the recreational needs of all town residents

The following sections describe and assess the existing open space resources and recreation facilities.

Existing Open Space and Recreational Facilities

Protected Open Space

Some of the open spaces in Salisbury such as agricultural and salt marsh areas are protected by virtue of ownership (state, town or land trusts), legal status (Article 97 land)² or restrictions such as the state Chapter 61 program which provides tax relief in return for preservation of agricultural uses.³ Other open



spaces are privately owned and are not protected and thus could be developed at some point in the future. It should be noted that land restricted under the Chapter 61 program as well as town or state owned open space and recreational land not protected under Article 97 could potentially be converted to other uses. See Map __ for the location of the protected open space in Salisbury.

Town Owned Protected Open Space

The Town of Salisbury owns several parcels of land that are protected open space including a the 1.3 acre Town Green located in Salisbury Square, a 5.5 acre triangular lawn and treed area located at the corner of Lafayette Road and Pike Street and about 19

² Article 97 of the Massachusetts constitution requires a 2/3 vote of the legislature to transfer land that has been taken for open space and recreational use to other uses.

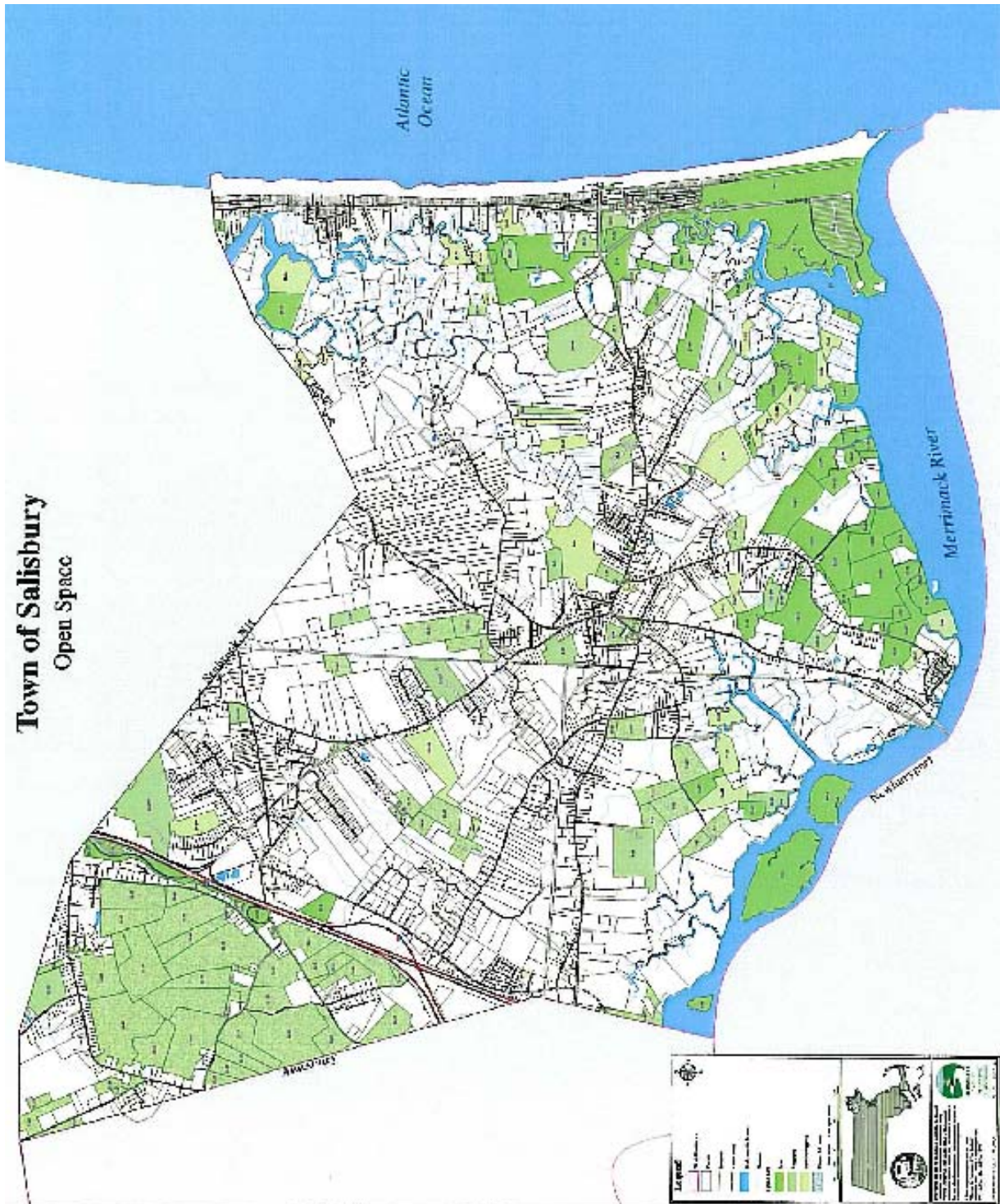
³ Massachusetts general laws Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B provide local tax incentives for property owners that are willing to restrict the use of land for forestry, farming or outdoor recreational activities. Once a property is restricted in accordance with the regulations, local communities have the right to purchase the property if it is to be sold or used for another purpose and also receive some reimbursement for lost tax revenues.

½ acres of marsh land located along the Merrimack River. An additional 55 acres of land located south of the New Hampshire border east of Interstate Route 95 are part of the Town's wellfields/water supply system.

State Owned Protected Open Space

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts also owns open space in Salisbury including Salisbury Beach, the 532 acres Salisbury Beach State Reservation and other various wildlife refuge and sanctuary parcels including marshlands and three islands located in the Merrimac River (Carr Island, Ram Island, and Eagle Island).

Figure 1: Existing Open Space and Recreation Facilities



Essex County Greenbelt Association Protected Open Space

The Essex County Greenbelt Association, a member supported nonprofit land trust that has conserved over 12,000 acres of land in Essex County, owns sixteen parcels of land in Salisbury, totaling 124.7 acres generally consists of salt marshes and forests. The holdings include three parcels of land in and around the Pettengill farm totaling about 56 acres off of Beach and Ferry Roads.

Chapter 61 Lands

There are about 837 acres that are classified as Chapter 61 Lands in Salisbury. The lands comprise 75 parcels of which none are recreational; one is forest land (14 acres) and 74 (823 acres) are agricultural lands ranging in size from less than ½ to 62 acres. These parcels are predominantly located in the northwestern “Plains” region of the Town.

Recreational Trails

The Town and the Salisbury Coastal Trails Group, a local volunteer advocacy organization, have recently focused significant attention on developing and expanding the system of walking trails and bike paths in the community. The system is part of the regional *Coastal Trails Network*, an emerging 30-mile, public system of bicycle and pedestrian trails that link the unique coastal features, town centers, neighborhoods and transportation hubs in the communities of Amesbury, Newbury, Newburyport and Salisbury. Several miles of the *Coastal Trails Network* are already in use. The Salisbury Coastal Trails Group sponsors a web site <http://www.salisburyma.gov/trails/index.html>

that provides updates on various trail activities as well as related links and a trail map that has recently been published and is shown on Page 5.

Four trails comprise the portion of the *Coastal Trails Network* located in Salisbury. These trails, which are described below, include the Salisbury Point Ghost Trail, the Old Eastern Marsh Trail, the Beach Road Bike Lanes and the Mudnock Road Link.

Salisbury Ghost Trail

The Salisbury Point Ghost Trail is a one mile long east/west trail located west of Lion's Park and north of Route 110. The trail extends from Cushing Street westward towards Rabbit Road and includes a small parking area off of Bartlett Street. The trail is improved with



Salisbury Point Ghost Trail

hard packed stone dust and is used for walking and bicycling. The trail passes through native woodlands.

Old Eastern Marsh Trail

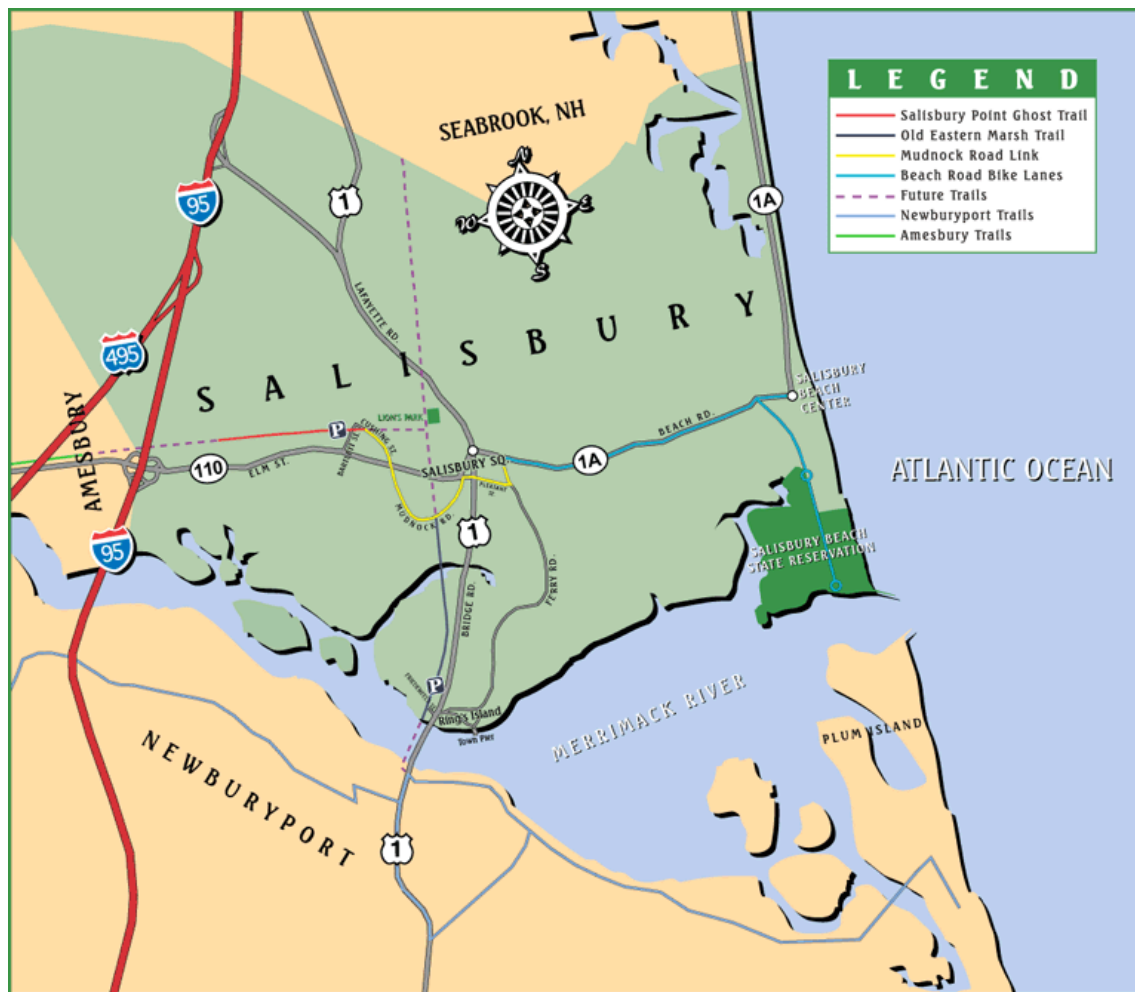
The Old Eastern Marsh Trail is a north south trail that extends approximately 1.4 miles from the Merrimack River northerly to Mudnock Road. The trail is open and used for walking and mountain biking. The trail passes by large expanses of salt marsh and tidal creeks that comprise part of the regional *Great Marsh* system and offers amazing views

of the Merrimack River at its southern end and excellent bird watching opportunities (see Chapter *, Natural and Cultural Resources for a description of the *Great Marsh*).

Beach Road Bike Paths

The Beach Road bike paths extend easterly approximately 2.2 miles from Salisbury Square to Salisbury Beach. The lanes are currently not marked but there are plans to add lines to the pavement to create wide marked lanes in 2008.

Figure 2: Salisbury Trails Map



Source: <http://www.salisburyma.gov/trails/html/map.html>

Mudnock Road Link

The 1.6 mile Mudnock Road Link provides a roadway link connecting the Salisbury Point Ghost Trail, the Old Eastern Marsh Trail and the Beach Road Bike Paths on either side of Salisbury Square.

The Town of Salisbury recently secured a 99 year lease from the MBTA and funding from the federal government (federal highway funds) to design and install a bike path along the Old Eastern Marsh Trail that extends from the Merrimack River to Mudnock Road. Design of the bike path is currently underway and construction is expected to commence in 2008/2009. This work will be coordinated with a state-sponsored high priority wetlands restoration and flood control project being planned at Town Creek (see the Natural Resources element).

In addition, the Town has recently received funding to extend and improve the trail system including a \$50,000 state Recreational Trails Grant to extend the Salisbury Point Ghost Trail from its current terminus at Cushing Street to Lion's Park and a \$2,500 grant from the Essex National Heritage Commission to develop entrance and interpretive signs for the Old Eastern Marsh Trail for installation by the summer of 2008.

The Town, with financial assistance from the Salisbury Chamber of Commerce and the Coastal Trails Coalition (a non-profit organization advocating for the Coastal Trails Network that receives technical assistance and support from the National Park Service Rivers and Trails Program, the Essex National Heritage Commission and the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy) recently published the *Salisbury Coastal Trails Brochure* which contains a map and description of the Town's trail systems and is posted on the Salisbury

Coastal Trails Group web site (see map on previous page). The Town also worked with a local property owner, Anne Jones, to secure a recreational trail easement to provide a direct connection from the Salisbury Point Ghost Trail to Lions' Park.

Parks and Athletic Fields

The Town of Salisbury Department of Public Works manages and oversees the Town's park and recreational facilities including all athletic fields, courts and playgrounds. The Town also participates in organized youth baseball and softball activities. The Town's parks and athletic fields, which are described below, include Lions Park, Memorial School, the Beach Road Field and facilities at the Salisbury Elementary School. The Town also has an outdoor skate park facility.

Lion's Park

Lion's Park is Salisbury's primary outdoor recreational facility. The park which is located northeast of Salisbury Square off of Lafayette Road is approximately 13 acres in size. The park includes several facilities including a



Lions Park

lighted baseball and softball field with scoreboards and a jointly used concession stand. Both of the fields are well maintained and heavily used. Two lighted tennis courts in good condition are located in the southern portion of the park and an unlit basketball court, which is in need of some maintenance, is located near the Lion's Way entrance to the park.

The park also includes a small tot-lot with an adjacent swing set, a pavilion with picnic tables and public restroom facilities. The park closes at 9:00pm. There is inadequate parking located at the main entrance to the park off of Lion's Way, but there is additional parking capacity at the Hilton Senior Center on Lafayette Road.

Memorial School

The 5 ½ acre Memorial School facility is a former elementary school located just west of Salisbury Square that is currently leased by the Boys & Girls Club of the Lower Merrimack Valley. The site contains one full size basketball court and two half size basketball courts, a Little League baseball field, and a Pony League baseball field used by the in-town Farm and Pony baseball leagues. During the summer, there is a "Summer Adventure Program" run by the Boys & Girls Club which provides summertime activities for the youth. Parking at this facility is sufficient. There is a tot lot located on the south side of the building which is little used and in need of upgrading.

Beach Road Field

The Beach Road Field, which is used for little league games, is located on a 6.6 acre Town-owned parcel on Beach Road about 500 yards west of the Beach Center. The site includes an unlit Little League baseball field with two dugouts, a small stand for bench seating, and a small concession stand. Parking is available on a gravel lot located on the eastern side of the site.

Beach Road Skateboard Park

Across Beach Road from the Beach Road baseball field and west of the Hunt Memorial Parking Lot is the Town's only outdoor skateboard Park. The facility contains approximately twenty parking spots and is lit.

New Salisbury Elementary School

The Salisbury Elementary School located on Lafayette Street is a 22.25 acre site that includes two full size basketball courts which are in excellent condition, one half size basketball court which needs repair and one little league field. There is ample parking available at this facility adjacent to the full size basketball courts. These recreational facilities are primarily used by the school and not the community at large.

Youth Sports Programs

The Town participates in both in-town and inter-town youth baseball and softball leagues as described below.

Baseball



The Salisbury Youth Baseball Softball League offers an in town only instructional division baseball for a Rookie League (ages 5 and 6) and a Farm League (ages 7 and 8). These leagues offer a combined Tee Ball and

Coach Pitch program from March to June as an introduction to organized baseball. The games are held at Memorial Field. In 2007, the Rookie League had four teams and the Farm League had eight teams. There is also an Inter-town Minor League for children ages 8 through 10 and an Inter-town Major League for children ages 10 through 12. The Town participates in the Minor League with four other communities, Byfield-Newbury, Rowley and Seabrook which is comprised of 18 teams of which 4 are Salisbury teams. The Minor League home games are held at the Beach Road Field and Lions Park. The Major League involves the same communities with the addition of Georgetown and is comprised of 16 teams of which 5 are Salisbury teams. All of the home games are played at Lions Park. The season extends from April through May.

Softball

The Town of Salisbury also participates in the Essex Softball Association League which is a competitive fast-pitch program open to all girls grades 3-8 and includes three leagues, the Farm League (grades 3 and 4), the Junior League (grades 5 and 6), and the Senior League (grades 7 and 8). The 2007 season extended from the end of April to early June and 12 games were held. The league is comprised of teams from Boxford, Georgetown, Ipswich, Middleton, Newbury, Rowley, Topsfield, and Salisbury. The softball games are held at Lion's Park.

Facilities for Seniors

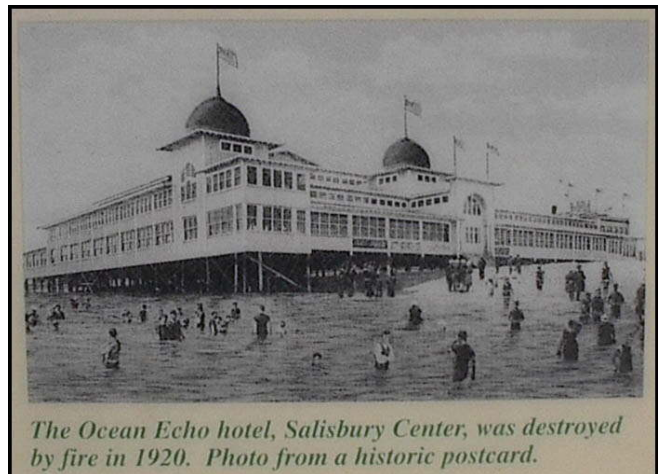
The William Hilton Senior Center is located on Lafayette Road and has recently undergone significant renovations. The Center is run by the Salisbury Council on Aging which provides seniors with an abundance of activities throughout the year. Weekly

activities include but are not limited to educational seminars, various health and exercise classes, computer classes, cookouts, trips, bingo and dancing. There is a van available to seniors for transport to local appointments every Monday and Tuesday from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm.

Public Beaches

Salisbury Beach is a 3.8 mile long barrier island of varying width that forms the eastern boundary of the Town of Salisbury. The beach is Salisbury's most well-known and used open space and recreation resource and has always provided significant recreational and open space opportunities for the Town's residents and visitors. During the later 1800's, the beach was developed as a resort with hotels and fine restaurants as well as food concession stands and amusement parks.

Vacation cottages were developed on the adjacent streets and during the 1930's and 1940's Salisbury Beach hosted some of the top musical entertainers of the era including Glenn Miller, Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong. During the latter part of the twentieth century the tourist related facilities began to decline and the seasonal



Source: <http://www.salisburybytheseashore.com>

cottages were transformed into year round homes as the economic value of properties located along the beach area increased.

The beach is comprised of level sandy beaches and extensive dune systems and is heavily used by the public for sunbathing, swimming, fishing (surf casting), bird watching and strolling. Most of the beach is owned by the State Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), except for a few privately owned parcels which extend onto the beach close to the Beach Center. The southern part of the beach is comprised of the 521 acre, Salisbury State Reservation. The Beach Center is a mixed use area located at the end of Broadway and provides the main point of access to the beach. The area contains

amusement park facilities, go-cart racing, miniature golf and arcades as well as music and dancing facilities, retail uses such as antique and specialty shops, and a movie theater. Fairly dense residential uses abut the beach, north of the Center. While no longer



containing the expansive amusement facilities of its heyday, the beach still experiences heavy use by residents and visitors for sunbathing, strolling and surfcasting and those partaking in the remaining private recreational facilities located in the Beach Center.

The State owns and maintains 14 designated public access points to the beach from the adjacent streets. The access points are marked by signs and consist of sand and timber boardwalks. The Town has a 672 space public parking lot (Hunt Memorial Municipal Parking Facility) located on the south side of Beach Road that charges \$6 per day. There

is also an 87 space metered parking lot located on the eastern portion of the lot which allows two hour parking. Along Broadway there is ten minute parking along the south side of the road and a combination of ten minute and metered parking on the north side of the road. Public restroom facilities are located on Cable Avenue adjacent to the parking lot, behind the police station.

The Town has plans to develop a new Boardwalk along the Beach Center. Based on the current planning,⁴ the boardwalk is designed as a 450 foot long curvilinear structure with a varying width of 16 to 24 feet located along Oceanfront South at the end of Broadway on land owned by the State. The design includes a 7,000 square foot plaza equipped with a new band shell to be placed at the end of Broadway loop.



⁴ Salisbury Beach Boardwalk Feasibility Study prepared by VHB and dated December, 2006.

The boardwalk would close off two existing paths to the beach that cross the aforementioned dune which would allow dune grass to re-colonize in this location. Beach access would be provided at to the northern and southern ends of the boardwalk.

Salisbury Beach State Reservation is located along the southern portion of the beach and abuts the Atlantic Ocean and the Merrimack River. This 521-acre park offers swimming, boating, fishing and camping, and is very popular with trailer campers. Facilities include a 484-site campground with renovated bathhouses, an extensive day-use parking lot, three new comfort stations for the beach going public with over the dune boardwalks, and a new playground and pavilion area.



Over Dune Boardwalk

The facility also has two boat ramps at the southern end of the park on the Merrimack River. In addition to camping and sunbathing, visitors to the reservation also partake in bird watching and viewing the harbor seals that are often found sunning on the Merrimack River jetty. The reservation is heavily used and according to statistics prepared by the DCR, is tied with Nickerson State Park in Cape Cod as the state's most popular state parks. The user fees for the facility include a \$7/day fee for parking and a \$20/ night for in-state residents and \$22/night for out-of state resident fee for camping.

The use of the beach as an open space and recreational resource is supported by the Town, state and local organizations. In 2007 the Chamber of Commerce and several local business and institutions sponsored the first annual *Sand and Sea Festival*. The two day festival included various activities that highlighted the recreational uses of the beach including sea-dooing, surfing and kayaking demonstrations as well as kite-flying, live music and fireworks. A local non-profit organization, the Salisbury Boardwalk Partnership, which is comprised of local residents and businesses, fosters and promotes initiatives to revitalize Salisbury Beach Center and the Boardwalk. Additionally, DCR sponsors the annual five mile *Salisbury Beach Race* which is currently in its 29th year.

Water-Based Recreational Facilities

Salisbury's unique location along both the Merrimack River and the Atlantic Ocean provides excellent opportunities for water-based recreation and there are several public and private water-based recreational facilities located in the Town including recreational marinas, a Town Pier and two state boat ramps.

Recreational Marinas

There are three privately owned marinas located along the Merrimack River in Salisbury. Bridge Marina (formerly Dawn's Marina) is a 116 +/- slip marina located at 14 1st Street, Ring's Island just east of the Route 1 bridge. The facility provides 4,000 linear feet of berthing space and offers dockside water and electrical services, a marina building with a club room, showers and restroom facilities and a ship store.

Corbin's Boatyard is located further east on 2nd Street. This facility is a small private marina that has a ramp and floating dock system.

Cove Marina is located west of the Route 1 Bridge off of Friedenfels Street. This marina has 142 +/- slips and 14 moorings offers full services including laundry, showers, restrooms, picnic and play areas, and water, electrical, cable and internet utility services.

Party Boats

There are charter fishing boats operating out of Bridge Marina on the Merrimack River in Salisbury. The Clipper Fleet offers deep sea fishing excursions including full day trips on the Challenger and ¾ day trips on the Sundance II. There are also smaller for hire charter fishing vessels such as Fish Finder Charter, Rings Island Charter and Nicky Moe.



Boat Ramps

Salisbury State Reservation has two public two boat ramps located on the Merrimack River at the Joseph M. Limoli Black Rock Creek Boat Ramp.



Joseph M. Limoli Black Rock Creek Boat Ramp

An older, concrete ramp is located at the facility and is somewhat tide restricted and does not contain floating docks. A newer and wider concrete ramp was constructed around six years ago just south of the older ramp. This facility includes floating docks on either side with 15 minute tie up and is designed for all tide access. The facility includes 72 boat trailer parking spaces.

Town Pier

There is a public (town-owned) pier “Town Pier” located off Ferry Street on Rings Island in the Merrimack River. The pier is a timber, pile supported structure that is equipped with a davit to allow fisherman to load and unload from the pier. There are also a series of floats at along the end of the pier which provide berthing for about fifty dinghies to access boats on moorings in the River. A \$50/year fee is charged for the berths. The pier also provides ample opportunity for public views and bird watching. There is a small gravel parking lot located on the upland side of the pier.



Fishing

According to the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) publication “*Massachusetts Saltwater Recreational Guide*”, approximately 50% of all salt water recreational fishing trips occur from shore and surfcasting is very popular at the Salisbury Beach State Reservation along the Atlantic Ocean and the Merrimack River.